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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY 0001
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1709

S E C R E T PARIS 000637

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2019
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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR POLITICAL-MILITARY TALKS IN PARIS
MAY 14, 2009

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark Pekala, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) Summary. French officials view the upcoming continuation of the 2 plus 2 political-military talks, initially launched in November of last year, as an important affirmation of the new administration's desire for increased bilateral cooperation and coordination with France on major global challenges. This cable provides an overview of French positions on key issues on the proposed agenda. The planned May 14 discussions give us an opportunity to press France for increased engagement in Afghanistan, including in civil reconstruction, and caution against a too precipitous drawdown in KFOR and EUFOR in the Balkans. Further, we should push for French support in the Macedonia name dispute with Greece and be prepared for another French push for an OSCE summit to discuss European security issues with Russia. French officials may again request improving our bilateral intelligence cooperation in operational areas and support as French reintegration into the military command of NATO is implemented over the course of the next few months. Both of your interlocutors are well-established in their current positions and anxious for regular contact with new administration officials, both having already traveled to Washington in recent weeks. End summary.

AFGHANISTAN

12. (C/NF) French officials openly acknowledge that they must do more to explain to publics the importance of our mission in Afghanistan. In recent months, GOF officials downplayed the possibility of additional French deployments in Afghanistan in an effort to de-link that conflict (which the public continues to view as an "American war") with the controversial return to NATO's integrated military command. In opinion polls, French citizens consistently disapprove of military deployments to Afghanistan while conversely expressing overwhelmingly support for civil initiatives aimed at institution-building and reconstruction. Rhetorically, French officials, particularly FM Kouchner, fervently support the view that there is "no purely military solution to Afghanistan" and place a great emphasis on a comprehensive approach. However, due to the current economic crisis, the fact is that France is more able to deploy military assets than financial or other assistance this year. Elysee and military sources have confirmed to us that current French planning is to turn over RC-Capital to Afghan and other allied forces this year, and then to rotate their RC-Capital troops to RC-East to join their maneuver battalion in Kapisa (which would further be quietly supplemented with the

necessary enablers). The goal is to make more French forces available for combat operations, without violating high-level public declarations by both the French Foreign and Defense Ministers that no "new" troops would be deployed to Afghanistan this year.

¶3. (C/NF) On the civil side, the GOF expects to provide approximately USD 40 million this year (an amount which was increased from the previously allotted USD 10 million for 2009). In addition, current plans call for 150 French gendarmes to be deployed to Afghanistan by June as part of a 300-man European Gendarmerie Force, to be placed under the authority of the recently approved NATO Training Mission for Afghanistan (NTM-A). The French plan is to initially deploy these civil forces in the Kabul region to ensure stability and then backfill when French troops rotate from the capital to deploy to RC-East. The Elysee is also starting to look at the possibility of deploying additional OMLTs in response to President Sarkozy's unexpected offer to President Obama on the margins of the NATO summit. Your meeting could be a good opportunity to push for a progress report and reiterate the standing need for additional OMLTs to mentor Afghan National Army units.

¶4. (C/NF) Given the French support for a more comprehensive approach to Afghanistan, your visit is a good opportunity to urge the French to think more creatively about how to bolster their civilian commitment, perhaps using military resources if that is where they have greater flexibility and capacity. France has consistently declined to stand up a PRT with their other troops because of ideological resistance to having civilians subordinate to military command. However, post

understands that this policy has lately been under review within the MFA. France has a long history of incorporating development and reconstruction into its military missions in Africa, and these resources could be equally useful in Afghanistan. A description of the U.S. Agri-business Development Team (ADT) model might help the French find creative ways to ramp up civilian assistance in Afghanistan.

BALKANS

¶5. (C/NF) In a January speech to parliament, PM Fillon identified deployments in the Balkans as areas for potential drawdowns in military forces as part of an overall French defense re-structuring mandated by the 2008 White Paper on Defense and National Security. GOF officials are targeting KFOR on the grounds that Kosovo is now more stable and the situation no longer justifies maintaining such a large presence on the ground. Given French concerns about overstretched forces, officials are eager to shift KFOR troops to other greater needs -- in one recent meeting implying that resistance to downsizing efforts was coming more from some bureaucrats at NATO who do not want to reduce the KFOR presence for institutional reasons. At the same time, GOF officials are sensitive to our arguments against "unilateral" recall of troops and your visit can help reinforce the message that France should engage in extensive consultations with NATO before any decision is taken. France shares our concerns about recent violence against EULEX in Kosovo, but French officials have emphasized the difficulty of pressuring Belgrade further on Kosovo-related matters given the need for balance with reinforcing Serbia's EU orientation. France is deeply unhappy with the Netherlands, insistent, "shortsighted" position of blocking Serbia's Stabilization and Accession Agreement (SAA) absent the arrest of Radko Mladic.

¶6. (C/NF) On Bosnia, France is eager to close down the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and transform it into an EU mission headed by the EU Special Representative (EUSR), based on the BiH government progress. Although the GOF continues to acknowledge the importance of Bosnia fulfilling the requirements laid out in the 5 plus 2 agenda, France may seek to avoid a negative Peace and

Implementation Council assessment of Bosnia,s stability and implementation of Dayton in order to support a quicker transition to a EUSR. Although receptive to U.S. arguments against unilateral drawdowns of EUFOR to a training mission, GOF officials have recently warned us that current deployment levels are unsustainable and that delays in moving to the smaller training mission threaten European unity. French officials view Bosnia as the best model of a transition from peacekeeping to nation-building, so are anxious to demonstrate visible progress.

¶7. (C/NF) On Macedonia, France has been unwilling to pressure its fellow EU member Greece to show greater flexibility on the name issue. France is also interested in sales of military aircraft (Rafale fighters) to Greece, which makes them even less likely to intervene in this dispute. FM Kouchner said publicly in 2008 that the burden lies on Macedonia, as the NATO aspirant, to display more flexibility than in the past to find a solution. Our concern is that recent nationalist trends in Macedonia underscore the importance of reinforcing Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic orientation and the need for both states to show genuine will to resolve the issue and bring Macedonia into the NATO family.

INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION

¶8. (S/NF) A constant refrain in our high-level meetings with French officials is their request for increased intelligence cooperation, particularly in operational areas such as Afghanistan and the Gulf of Aden. While their requests for access to "four-eyes" information have been problematic, we may want to consider addressing French concerns with a more targeted approach. Our understanding is that the French objective is twofold: to increase their situational awareness of opposing forces in the numerous operations that we undertake together; and to enhance the integration of French

forces and individual staff officers within U.S. commands to a level that permits greater sharing of "friendly" operational information. Access to U.S. intelligence, otherwise reserved for a small group of English-speaking countries, is only part of their aim. They also seek the ability to integrate French officers into the staffs of U.S. commands (i.e. CENTCOM, AFRICOM, EUCOM, NAVCENT, CJTF-101) in a manner similar to the integration of Australian, Canadian, and British officers. A top-down effort to review our bilateral intelligence cooperation, starting at the policy level with elaboration of their objectives and working downward toward the details of implementation, could help us better leverage French cooperation and intelligence capacity into a closer partnership with the U.S.

CFE AND NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

¶9. (C/NF) French officials at the highest levels are interested in the Obama administration's proposals to breathe new life into disarmament and security efforts. Last year, President Sarkozy launched a proposal for an OSCE summit meeting to discuss a new European security architecture, and he remains very committed to the idea. French officials argue that the summit proposal, which was developed on the margins of the EU-Russia summit last year without input from allies, was a necessary response to the original proposal by Russian President Medvedev for a meeting among Europeans to discuss security cooperation. By anchoring the discussion within the OSCE, the French intent was to safeguard existing institutions and the importance of the transatlantic relationship in European security, while still acknowledging room for progress in other security instruments, such as CFE. Paris strongly supported the Parallel Actions Package pursued since July 2007 to help overcome the impasse on the A/CFE treaty. However, Russia's failure to implement the "Istanbul Commitments" of 1999 remains the key stumbling block, compounded now by its suspension of its treaty

obligations for 16 months and its occupation of Abkhaz and South Ossetian parts of Georgia. French officials are interested whether recent overtures to Russia, such as President Obama's announcement in Prague of plans to complete a new START treaty, are expected to positively impact security cooperation in other areas.

NATO STRATEGIC CONCEPT AND TRANSFORMATION

¶10. (S/NF) Now that the formal debate over French reintegration into NATO has been concluded, French officials are focusing on the next steps in NATO -- including filling the command posts in the Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk and the regional Lisbon command. The French military is expecting to increase its participation in NATO structures tenfold, including contributing an extra 20 million euros per year to the NATO budget and augmenting their presence by some 1000 additional staff. Rumors have floated (most appear to originate from internet sources) of possible French interest in transferring the Norfolk command to French territory. To date, no French official has raised this possibility with post. French support for NATO SYG-designate Rasmussen is high and they hope he will lead the continued reform of NATO into a more stream-lined, less bureaucratic, and more flexible alliance.

MISSILE DEFENSE

¶11. (C/NF) GOF officials are looking forward to hearing the Obama administration's plans for missile defense. In the past, Paris supported bilateral U.S. efforts to conclude missile defense agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic, but was reluctant to extend the system to all NATO members, largely on cost concerns. France remains concentrated on its internal military restructuring reforms, laid out in the White Paper published last year and now incorporated into a draft budgetary law for 2009-2015. That plan did not envisage a large cost outlay for missile defense and the frequent refrain that there is "not one euro" allocated to pay for missile defense is not expected to

change in the current French budgetary environment. That said, Paris remains interested in our plans and technology development and continues to evaluate the need for missile defense as we do, through the lens of concerns over Iranian proliferation.

DPRK

¶12. (S/NF) In general, GOF officials strongly support U.S. non-proliferation initiatives, including using the Six-Party framework to hold North Korea to its commitment to verifiably eliminate all its nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs. The April 5 DPRK missile test and expulsion of IAEA inspectors and the U.S. disablement team were equally worrisome to Paris, which supported the UN Security Council's Presidential Statement condemning the launch and subsequent agreement by the UNSCR 1718 Sanctions Committee to designate additional banned weapons-related goods and to designate entities for an asset freeze.

COMMENT

¶13. (C/NF) The fact that the new administration is willing to continue the bilateral political-military discussions launched last year is an important signal to Paris that France is a valued partner with a global reach. Although the current budgetary environment and military constraints may limit France's willingness to commit to resource-heavy initiatives in the short-term, GOF officials are able to take

the hard political decisions when necessary. We saw this last year when President Sarkozy chose to deploy a French OMLT with Dutch troops in Uruzgan, despite the dire warnings against such a move based on military and force protection concerns. This year, the Elysee is working quietly to try to move French troops based in Kabul doing security operations to a more critical combat role in RC-East, while still balancing previous political commitments. The French want to be major players and your interlocutors on Thursday are pragmatic and results-oriented. We look forward to seeing you later this week.

PEKALA